

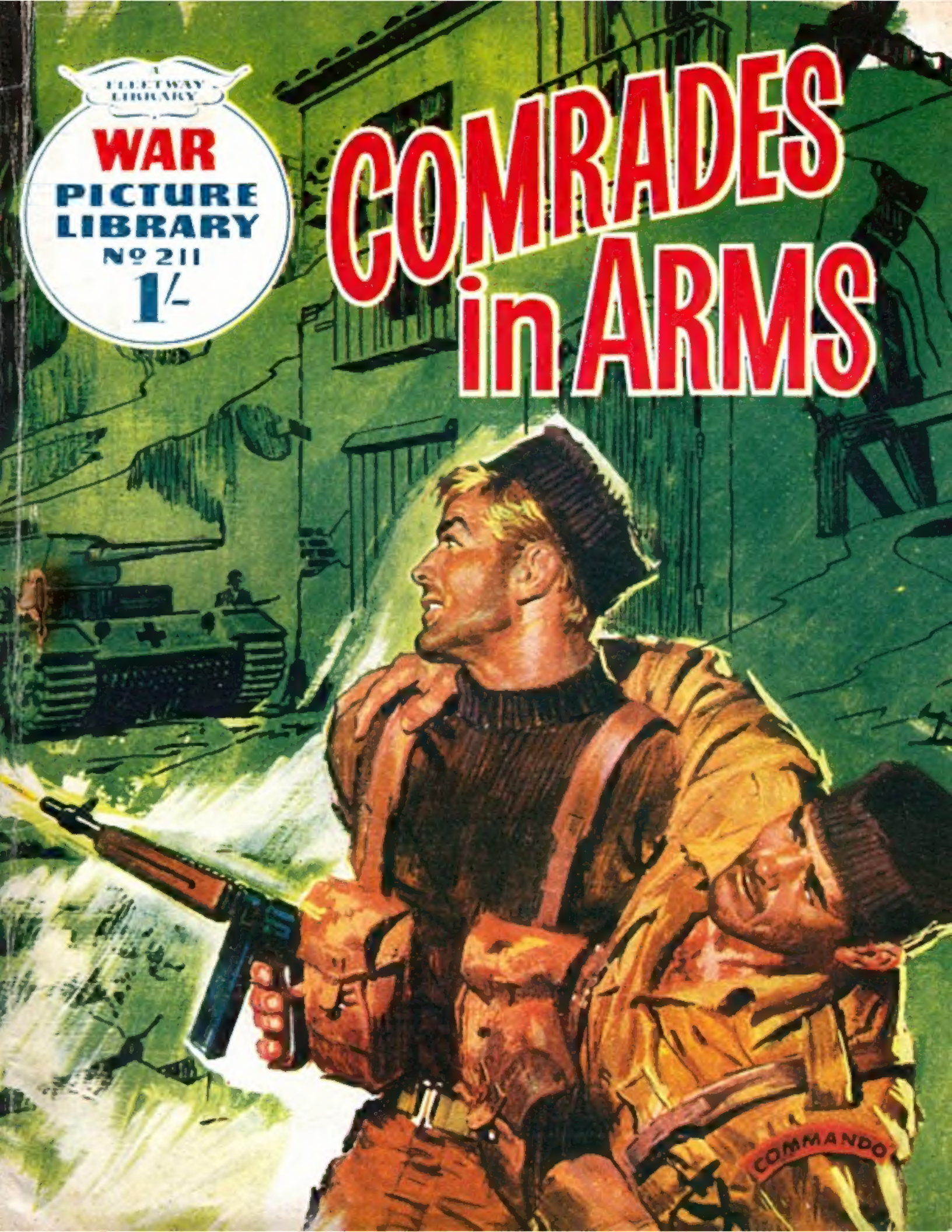
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COMRADES IN ARMS


THE COMMANDOS WERE TOUGH AND RUTHLESS, EXPERT IN THE ARTS OF MODERN WAR. THEY WORKED AS A TEAM—BESIDE EACH MAN STOOD ANOTHER HE COULD CALL HIS FRIEND. A COMRADE HE COULD RELY UPON, NO MATTER HOW TOUGH THE GOING...



BUT EVEN AMONG THE COMMANDOS, THERE WERE THOSE WHO COULD CALL NO MAN THEIR FRIEND. SUCH A MAN WAS THE NORWEGIAN, DAG LANGSTAAD...

Chapter 1. *The Lone Wolf*

THE SLIME OF THE DARTMOOR BOG SUCKED AT THE MAN IN ITS EVIL GRIP. IT WAS A MOMENT OF STARK HORROR FOR CORPORAL COLEMAN AS HIS FEARFUL CRIES MINGLED WITH THE SHRIEK OF A LASHING GALE...



I'M GOING UNDER!
FOR PETE'S SAKE —
HURRY!

WITH TERROR-SHOT EYES HE WATCHED AS HIS BIG-LIMBED COMPANION TORE A BRANCH FROM A TREE AS IF IT WERE A MERE TWIG. A SUDDEN UPSURGE OF HOPE RAN THROUGH HIS TORTURED BODY...



QUICK!
QUICK!

I'M COMING!

BEARING THE TREE BRANCH, THE BIG MAN STEPPED WARILY TO THE VERY EDGE OF THE MORASS...

SOON I PULL
YOU OUT—BE
CALM.

MOMENTS LATER, CORPORAL COLEMAN'S EAGER FINGERS CLAMPED UPON THE ROUGH LIFELINE. SLOWLY, HE FELT HIMSELF BEING DRAGGED TO SAFETY BY THE OTHERS' GREAT STRENGTH.

UGH!
KEEP PULLING,
LANGSTAAD.

EXHAUSTED, THE CORPORAL COLLAPSED ON THE RAIN-LASHED GROUND. EFFORTLESSLY, DAG LANGSTAAD HOISTED HIM ACROSS HIS BROAD SHOULDERS.

COME — WE
FIND A HOUSE
MAYBE.

DESPITE HIS BURDEN, THE NORWEGIAN STRODE QUICKLY INTO THE NIGHT AND AT LENGTH, HE CAME TO A ROUGH ROAD. IN THE DISTANCE, A LIGHT GLOWED FEEBLY...

AH, A
COTTAGE!

TO THE OWNERS OF THE COTTAGE, THE SUDDEN APPEARANCE OF MARINE COMMANDOS WAS NO UNUSUAL THING IN THOSE WARTIME DAYS. UNDERSTANDING HANDS WENT TO WORK ON THE MUDDY, EXHAUSTED CORPORAL. BUT THE BIG LANGSTAAD SEEMED NONE TOO CONCERNED...

CAN HE STAY
HERE, PLEASE?

AYE! OF COURSE,
THE POOR LAD LOOK'S
ALL IN!



THE WARMTH OF THE BLAZING LOG FIRE REVIVED CORPORAL COLEMAN AND HE SUDDENLY STARTED UP IN PROTEST AS THE NORWEGIAN TURNED TO THE DOOR...

I GO
NOW. MUST
HURRY.

BUT
YOU CAN'T GO
WITHOUT ME...



DAG LANGSTAAD TURNED, FROWNING...

WE HAVE
WASTED TOO MUCH TIME
ALREADY. I GO NOW—YOU
STAY HERE!

WAIT! WE'RE
A TEAM. YOU'RE
SUPPOSED TO BE
MY FRIEND!



LANGSTAAD SHRUGGED, HIS VOICE
EXPRESSIONLESS.

NO MAN IS
MY FRIEND. I FIGHT
ALONE—ALWAYS
BEST ALONE.



WITH THOSE CURT WORDS, THE STRANGE DAG LANGSTAAD STRODE OFF INTO
THE STORMY NIGHT.



BY SHEER STRENGTH AND ENDURANCE, THE LONE NORWEGIAN COMPLETED THE TWO-MAN EXERCISE ON TIME. BUT THE FOLLOWING MORNING, HE WAS BROUGHT BEFORE THE CHIEF INSTRUCTOR, COLONEL BAILEY...



BAD THING, LEAVING CORPORAL COLEMAN LIKE THAT, LANGSTAAD. AS YOU WELL KNOW WE TRY TO FOSTER THE TWO-MAN TEAM SPIRIT HERE — EACH HELPING THE OTHER...

EVERY COMMANDO IS EXPECTED TO REGARD HIS CHOSEN COMPANION AS THE OTHER HALF OF HIS BEING — OF HIS VERY LIFE, MAYBE.



HESITANTLY, AWKWARDLY, DAG LANGSTAAD TRIED TO EXPLAIN...

I COME TO ENGLAND TO FIGHT THE GERMANS. I NEED NO MAN'S HELP TO DO THAT. IT IS A PERSONAL THING.

YOU WILL FIGHT BETTER IF YOU WORK AS A TEAM, LANGSTAAD. PERHAPS IF WE COULD FIND THE RIGHT PARTNER FOR YOU...



DISMISSING THE NORWEGIAN, COLONEL BAILEY SUMMONED ONE OF HIS YOUNG OFFICERS, CAPTAIN NORRIS...

BIT OF A MYSTERY,
THAT LANGSTAAD CHAP.
DECENT ENOUGH FELLOW BUT
TOO SILENT, TOO ALOOF.
WHAT DO WE KNOW
ABOUT HIM?

NOT A LOT,
SIR. I'LL GET
HIS FILE.

PRESENTLY, CAPTAIN NORRIS RETURNED
WITH THE NORWEGIAN'S HISTORY AND READ
FROM THE BRIEF NOTES. COLONEL BAILEY
LISTENED CLOSELY...

IT SEEMS, SIR, THAT LANGSTAAD
IS A NATIVE OF PAALOY, A NORWEGIAN
FISHING PORT. BEEN IN SHIPS SINCE A
BOY. FATHER WAS A BOAT-BUILDER BUT
WHEREABOUTS NOW UNKNOWN - BELIEVED
DEAD OR A PRISONER...

AS NORRIS READ ON, COLONEL BAILEY COULD PICTURE THE EVENTS...

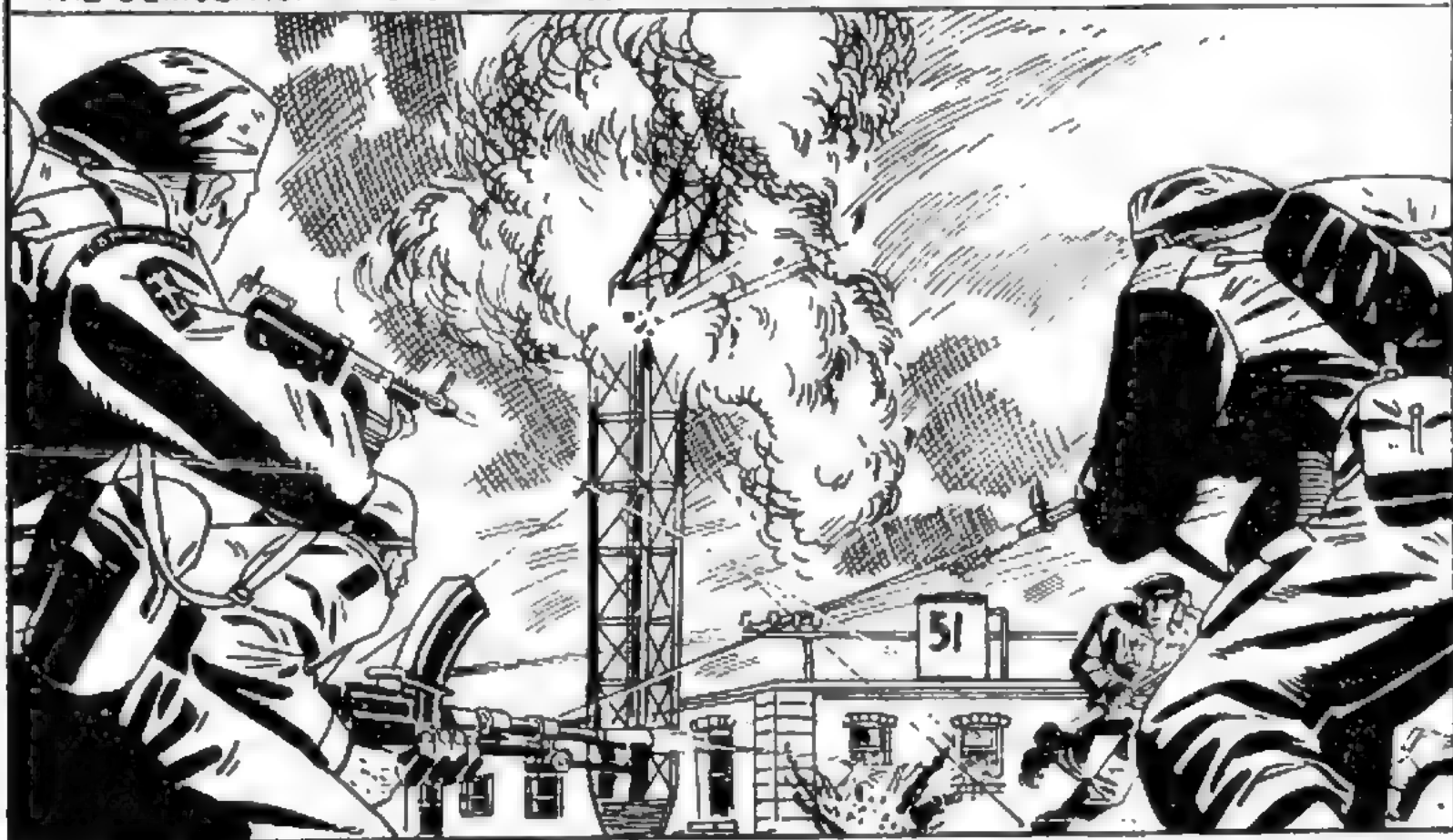
"IT WAS DURING THE RAID ON THE RADIO STATION NORTH OF PAALOY, THAT LANGSTAAD CAME TO OUR NOTICE. IT WAS A SIX-BOAT NIGHT ASSAULT, NO PRELIMINARY BOMBARDMENT..."



"THE BOATS BEACHED ON SCHEDULE AND THE CLIFFS BELOW THE STATION WERE SCALED WITHOUT THE ENEMY BEING ALERTED..."



"ONCE THEY HIT THE JERRIES AT THE STATION, THE FIREWORKS STARTED. BUT THE DEMOLITION WAS CARRIED OUT ACCORDING TO PLAN..."



"WITH MINIMUM CASUALTIES, THE WITHDRAWAL TO THE BOATS WAS BEGUN. THAT WAS WHEN LANGSTAAD CAME ON THE SCENE - IN A SMALL FISHING BOAT..."



"THE LEADING ASSAULT CRAFT SLOWED ALONGSIDE HIM AND APPARENTLY, LANGSTAAD WHO WAS IN IT, PLEADED WITH THE MEN IN BROKEN ENGLISH TO TAKE HIM WITH THEM."

MY NAME LANGSTAAD! COME TO ENGLAND WITH YOU, PLEASE. I FIGHT GOOD - I FIGHT GERMANS!



"IT SEEMS HE WAS SO INSISTANT THAT THEY TOOK HIM ABOARD, STILL BREATHING FIRE AND BRIMSTONE ABOUT THE GERMANS..."

ONE DAY I COME BACK. KILL GERMANS - DRIVE THEM FROM NORWAY!



"WITHIN A WEEK OF SETTING FOOT IN BRITAIN, HE VOLUNTEERED FOR THE COMMANDOS - AND HERE HE IS!"

THE BRIEF RECORD OF THE NORWEGIAN DAG LANGSTAAD CAME TO AN END. CAPTAIN NORRIS LOOKED ACROSS AT COLONEL BAILEY WHO SAT PONDERING...

I KNOW WE'VE GOT TO MAKE ALLOWANCES FOR THESE POOR DEVILS, DRIVEN FROM THEIR HOMELANDS — INCLINED TO STAY APART FROM THEIR FELLOWS. BUT WE *MUST* THINK OF A SUITABLE TEAM MATE FOR HIM.



SUDDENLY THE COLONEL'S BROW CLEARED...

HOW ABOUT COUPLING LANGSTAAD WITH THAT FRENCH-CANADIAN FELLOW, PIERRE DUPRES? THEY'D HAVE QUITE A BIT IN COMMON — SAME KIND OF COUNTRY — SNOW, TIMBER, MOUNTAINS...



PIERRE DUPRES WAS A RUGGED EX-LUMBERJACK FROM THE BACKWOODS OF CANADA. IT WAS CAPTAIN NORRIS' JOB TO MOULD DUPRES AND LANGSTAAD INTO A TEAM...

FROM NOW ON YOU TWO MEN WILL WORK TOGETHER AS ONE. GET TO KNOW EACH OTHER WELL — YOUR LIVES MAY DEPEND ON IT.

SURE THING, SIR!



THE BIG NORWEGIAN ACCEPTED HIS NEW TEAM-MATE WITH THE SILENCE THAT WAS TYPICAL OF THE MAN. BUT AS THE TRAINING WENT ON, THE PAIR DID BECOME AN EFFICIENT PARTNERSHIP.



THEN AT LAST, THE WEEKS OF VIGOROUS TRAINING CAME TO AN END AND EACH MAN STOOD ON PARADE — A COMMANDO.



Chapter 2. *The Real Thing*

BY AUGUST, 1943, THE ALLIED ARMIES HAD INVADIED AND TAKEN THE ISLAND OF SICILY, THE STEPPING STONE TO OCCUPIED EUROPE. IT WAS TO THIS ISLAND THAT THE COMMANDOS WERE TRANSPORTED BY AIR.



IN A FEW SHORT HOURS, THE AIRCRAFT WERE WINGING ACROSS THE MOUNTAINOUS TERRAIN OF SICILY WHERE WEEKS OF BITTER FIGHTING HAD ENDED WITH THE WITHDRAWAL OF THE NAZI FORCES TO THE ITALIAN MAINLAND.

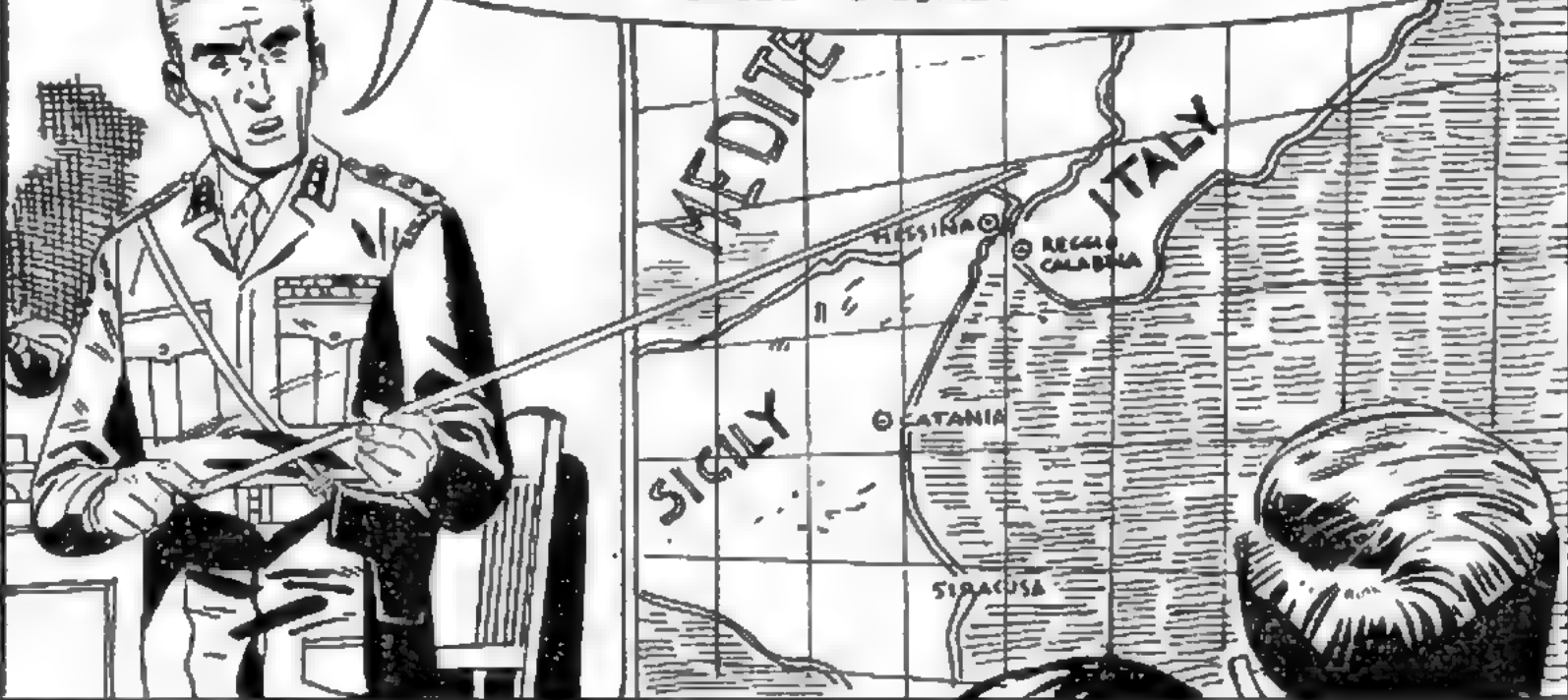


BUT THE WAR WAS SOON TO COME VERY CLOSE INDEED FOR DAG LANGSTAAD AND HIS FELLOW COMMANDOS. AS THEY MARCHED AWAY FROM THEIR AIRCRAFT, THEY NOTICED A LEAN, HAWK-FACED COLONEL WATCHING THEM APPRAISINGLY. IT WAS THEIR NEW COMMANDING OFFICER, COLONEL "TIGER" TRAFFORD.



AFTER A BRIEF SETTLING IN PERIOD, COLONEL TRAFFORD BEGAN TO MAKE HIS DYNAMIC PRESENCE FELT. THEIR TRAINING BECAME MORE SPECIALISED AND BEFORE LONG, THEY WERE BRIEFED FOR THEIR IMPORTANT TASK.

THE INVASION OF ITALY IS IMMINENT — AND YOU MEN HAVE THE PRIVILEGE OF BEING AMONG THE FIRST TO LAND. IT'LL BE YOUR TASK TO FIND OUT WHERE THE ENEMY'S DEFENCES ARE STRONGEST AND TO PINPOINT THEM FOR THE MAIN FORCES TO COME.



AS THE COLONEL DETAILED THE SEPARATE MISSIONS IT BECAME CLEAR THAT THE COMMANDOS' TOUGH TRAINING WOULD BE TESTED TO THE FULL. CAPTAIN NORRIS HE LEFT UNTIL LAST...

NORRIS — THERE'S A MOST VITAL UNDERSEA TELEPHONE CABLE BETWEEN HERE AND REGGIO IN ITALY. YOU WILL SECURE THE GERMAN END OF THAT CABLE BEFORE THEY CAN DESTROY IT.

VERY GOOD, SIR. DO WE KNOW WHERE THIS CABLE ENDS IN REGGIO?

FOR ANSWER, THE COLONEL PICKED UP A LARGE PHOTOGRAPH...

IT ENDS HERE, IN THE CABLE AND TELEGRAPH BUILDING IN THE CENTRE OF THE TOWN. WE'LL GET YOU AS MANY DETAILS AS POSSIBLE.

I'LL NEED A PRETTY STRONG PARTY, SIR.

YOU WILL INDEED, NORRIS!

WHEN HE HAD LEARNED ALL THE DETAILS OF THE MISSION, CAPTAIN NORRIS CHOSE HIS MEN.

OUR LITTLE EFFORT WILL BE TIMED FOR JUST A FEW HOURS BEFORE THE ALLIED MAIN ASSAULT AT FIRST LIGHT. IT'S NOT GOING TO BE A WALK-OVER, BUT THAT SHOULDN'T WORRY ANY OF YOU, I THINK.



THE YOUNG CAPTAIN SINGLED OUT TWO OF THE TOUGH-LOOKING GROUP OF COMMANDOS — BIG DAG LANGSTARD AND HIS STOCKY PARTNER, PIERRE DUPRES.

MOST OF YOU HAVE BEEN ITCHING FOR A CRACK AT JERRY. WELL, YOU'RE GOING TO GET IT — AND MORE BESIDES! BUT DON'T FORGET THIS IS STILL A TEAM-JOB — PERHAPS MORE SO!

SUITS US, SIR!

BUT THE NORWEGIAN SAID NOTHING AND NORRIS DID NOT PRESS HIM.

INSTEAD, HE TURNED TO THE STURDY GEORGE BOWERS, THE BREN GUNNER, AND HIS MAGAZINE HANDLER, THE SMALL BUT WIRY COCKNEY, FRANKIE BELL.

WHEN WE HIT THE OTHER SIDE, WE'LL POST A SIGNALLER ON THE BEACH. YOU TWO WILL STAY WITH HIM.

WE'LL DO THAT, SIR.



Comrades in Arms

ON THE NIGHT OF SEPTEMBER 2nd, THE EVE OF THE ALLIED INVASION OF ITALY, FOUR SMALL COMMANDO-LADEN ASSAULT BOATS SLIPPED OUT OF MESSINA HARBOUR, BOUND FOR THE ITALIAN SHORE.



EACH ASSAULT BOAT HAD ITS OWN LANDING POINT, ITS PASSENGERS THEIR SEPARATE TASKS. IN HIS OWN CRAFT, CAPTAIN NORRIS WENT OVER THE DETAILS ONCE MORE.

WELL, THIS IS IT!
LET'S SHOW THESE
NAZIS WHAT IT'S LIKE
TO TANGLE WITH
COMMANDOS.

AYE! WE
WILL THAT,
SIR.



THEN NORRIS TURNED TO LANGSTAAD AND HIS PARTNER, DUPRES...

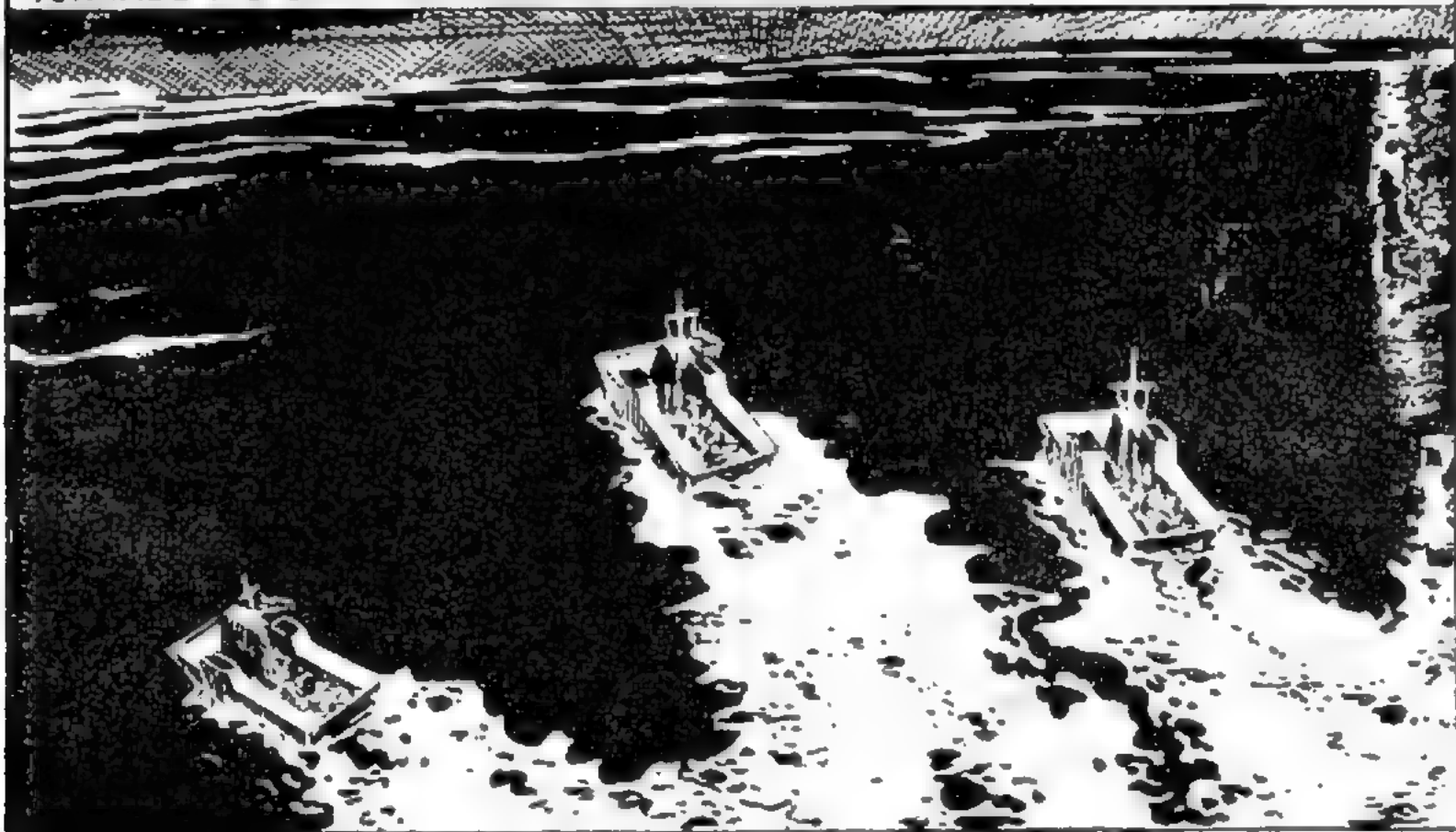
YOU TWO SHOULD MAKE A GOOD BATTERING RAM. WHEN THE TIME COMES, KEEP CLOSE BY ME AND DO AS I DO.

YOU BET, SIR!

VERY WELL.



THEY WERE CLOSING WITH THE SHADOWY ITALIAN COASTLINE AND AS IF AT SOME UNSEEN SIGNAL, EACH ASSAULT CRAFT CHANGED COURSE, EACH HEADING OFF TOWARDS ITS OWN RENDEZVOUS WITH THE ENEMY.



ALL WAS SILENT NOW SAVE FOR THE MUFFLED BEAT OF THE ENGINE. TO NORRIS'S MEN, IT SEEMED AN INTERMINABLE TIME BEFORE THEY GROUNDED GENTLY ON THE ITALIAN SANDY BEACH. THE RAMP CAME DOWN AND THE CAPTAIN LED THE WAY OUT OF THE SHALLOWS.



THEY ASSEMBLED IN THE LEE OF THE CLIFF, CHECKED THEIR WEAPONS — AND MOVED ON. BEHIND THEM, THEY LEFT CORPORAL GREEN, WITH HIS WIRELESS SET AND HIS TWO-MAN ESCORT, BOWERS AND BELL.

LET'S GIVE YOU
A HAND WITH THE
WIRELESS, CORP.

THANKS!



BEFORE LONG, THE ASSAULT GROUP UNDER CAPTAIN NORRIS WERE STALKING CAUTIOUSLY THROUGH THE OUTSKIRTS OF REGGIO, SILENT AND DESERTED UNDER ITS CURFEW. NOTHING STIRRED.

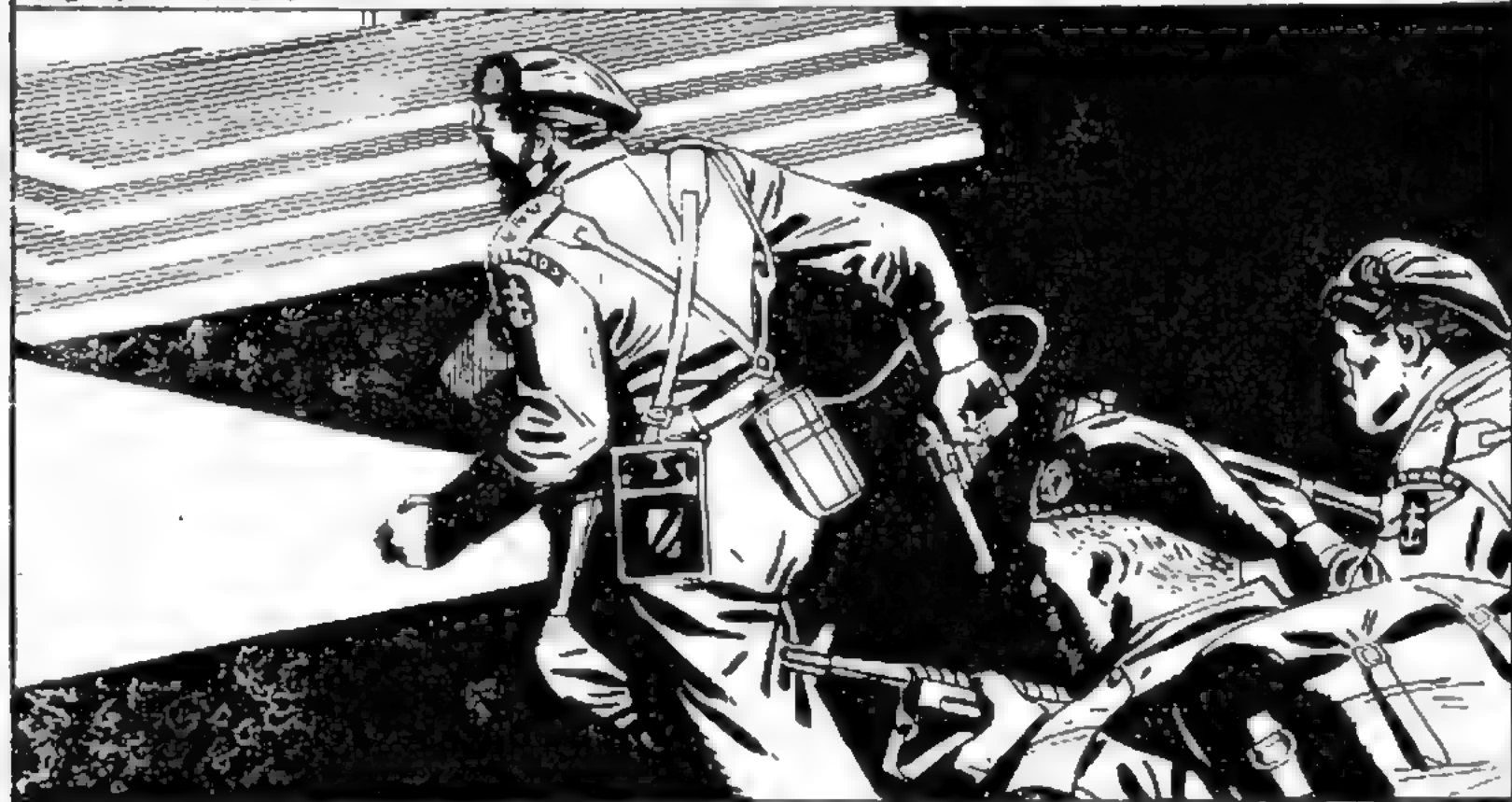


SLIPPING THROUGH THE SHADOWS FROM STREET TO STREET, THE COMMANDOS MOVED STEADILY TOWARDS THEIR OBJECTIVE. SUDDENLY, NORRIS PAUSED, LETTING OUT A HISS OF SATISFACTION...

THERE IT IS — THE CABLE AND TELEGRAPH BUILDING!



WITH QUICKENING PULSE, NORRIS SCANNED THE BIG MANY-SHUTTERED BUILDING. HERE AND THERE, A CHINK OF LIGHT BETRAYED THE SEEMING DESERTEDNESS OF THE PLACE. A SWIFT YET CAREFUL GLANCE ROUND AND HE LED THE WAY ACROSS THE STREET.



THEY WENT STRAIGHT THROUGH THE DOORWAY AT A FLAT RUN. ONLY ONE MAN WAS ON GUARD THERE—AND HE SCARCELY KNEW WHAT HIT HIM...



BUT THE COMMOTION, BRIEF THOUGH IT WAS, BROUGHT MORE GERMAN SOLDIERS RUNNING. SURPRISE WAS OVER — IT WAS NOW FORCE OF ARMS THAT WOULD CARRY THE DAY.



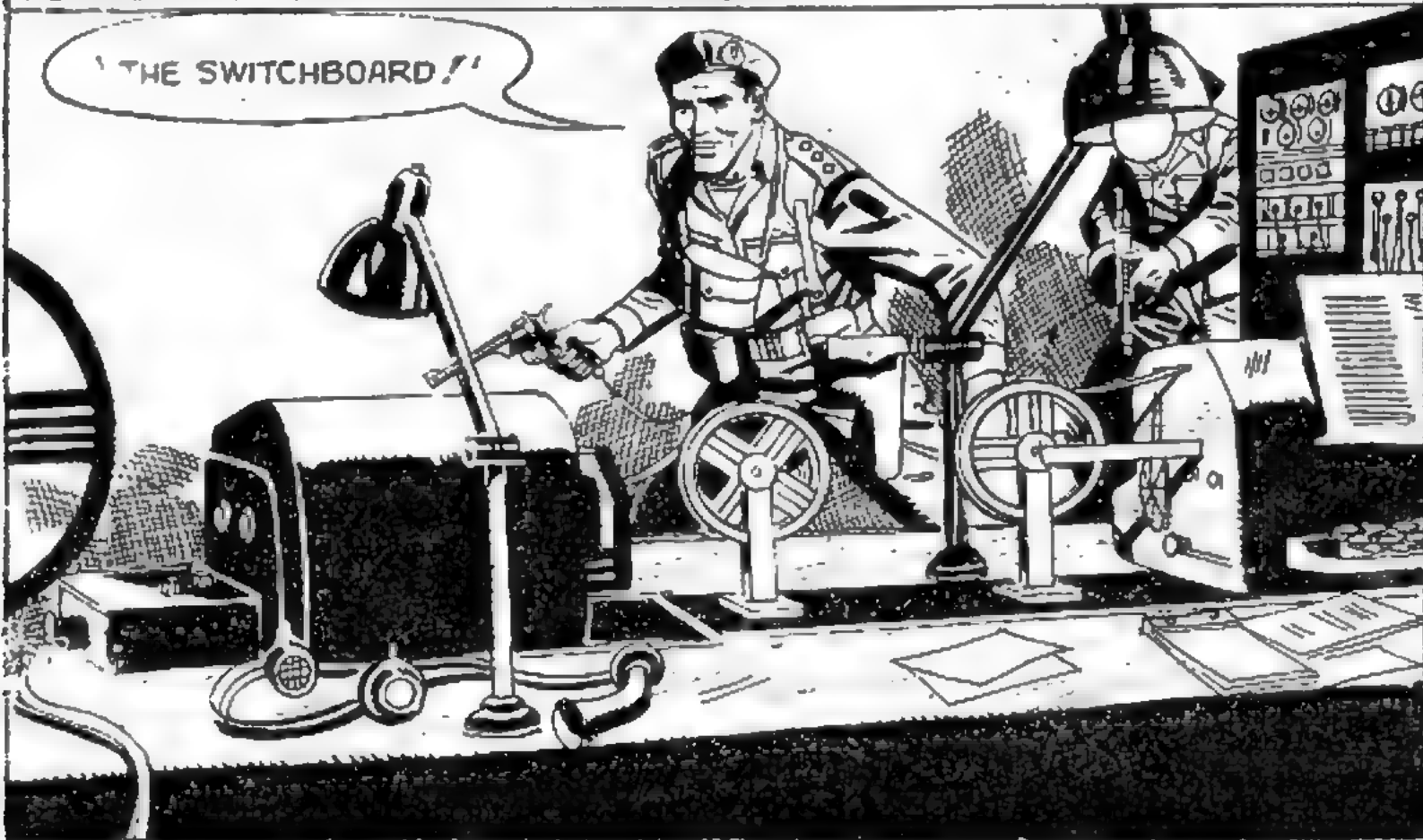
DAG LANGSTAAD, A FIERY GLINT IN HIS NORMALLY PALE BLUE EYES, WAS ONE OF THE FIRST TO OBEY NORRIS'S RAPPED COMMAND.



NORRIS HIMSELF, BOUNDING UP THE STAIRS OVER THE LIMP BODIES LEFT BY THE HUGE LANGSTAAD, WENT RAPIDLY FROM ROOM TO ROOM UNTIL HE FOUND THE ONE HE WAS SEARCHING FOR...



SNAPPED SHOTS DROPPED TWO GERMANS AND A HURRIED GLANCE ROUND TOLD NORRIS THAT HE HAD REACHED HIS OBJECTIVE.



BUT AT THE FIRST BREATH OF ALARM, THE GERMANS MUST HAVE BEGUN TO DESTROY THE INSTALLATION. WIRES WERE RIPPED OUT OF THE EQUIPMENT IN MANY PLACES.

SOMEBODY'S WRENCHED OUT THE LEADS! WE CAN'T USE IT!



BUT THE CABLE ITSELF, I THINK, IS OKAY, SIR!

A HASTY INSPECTION SHOWED THAT THE SWITCHBOARD COULD INDEED BE EASILY REPAIRED. BUT NOW CAME MORE URGENT NEWS...

WE'VE TAKEN THE WHOLE BUILDING, SIR — BUT THERE'S A STACK OF JERRIES COMING UP THE STREET!



THE DICKENS THERE IS!

GERMAN REACTION HAD BEEN SWIFT. EFFICIENTLY, THEY SURROUNDED THE BUILDING AND BEGAN TO POUR A MOUNTING VOLUME OF FIRE INTO THE WINDOWS AND DOORS.



SUDDENLY, THE DARKNESS WAS DISSOLVED BY THE GLARE OF STAR SHELLS. A SPANDAU ADDED ITS CLAMOUR TO THE DIN OF AUTOMATIC WEAPONS.



DAG LANGSTAAD'S TOMMY GUN STAMMERED AN ACCURATE REPLY TO THE SPANDAU, FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE HE HAD KNOWN HIM, PIERRE DUPRES NOTICED A GRIM SMILE ON THE NORWEGIAN'S FACE.



PIERRE DUPRES GRINNED, TOO — REMINDED WITH GUSTY HUMOUR OF HIS CANADIAN WOODLAND . . .

NOTHING
IS EASY—
NOTHING!

EVER SHOT WILD DUCK, DAG?
BOY, THIS AIN'T SHOOTING, IT'S
TOO EASY!

THE NORWEGIAN SPOKE GRUFFLY. HE KNEW THE NAZI BREED. HE KNEW THEIR UTTER RUTHLESSNESS. NOW CAME THE SAVAGE BLAST OF MORTAR SHELLS TO SWELL THE ENEMY'S FIRE-POWER.

FEUER!

THE NAGGING MORTARING WENT ON, CRASHING THROUGH THE ROOF OF THE BUILDING, THREATENING LIVES WITH COLLAPSING MASONRY.



CAPTAIN NORRIS KNEW THEIR POSITION WAS BECOMING DESPERATE. THE ENEMY HAD HIT BACK TOO SOON, TOO HARD.

HOW IS IT, STOKES?

PRETTY BAD, SIR. WE'VE LOST TOO MANY MEN.

NORRIS THREW A FRUSTRATED LOOK AT THE USELESS SWITCHBOARD...

WE NEED REINFORCEMENTS—AND THAT DARNED SWITCHBOARD COULD HAVE GOT ME THROUGH TO COLONEL TRAFFORD...



THERE WAS STILL ONE OTHER WAY OF GETTING A MESSAGE THROUGH. HE CALLED FOR LANGSTAARD AND DUPRES...

GET BACK TO THE BEACH.
TELL GREEN TO SIGNAL BASE
FOR HELP.

SURE THING, SIR! MEBBE THEY'LL
SWITCH THOSE OTHER GUYS TO GIVE US
A HAND.



THE TWO COMMANDOS MANAGED TO SLIP UNSEEN THROUGH THE CLOSE RING OF GERMANS — ONLY TO RUN FOUL OF AN OUTLYING ENEMY PATROL.



THEN BEGAN A HARD RUNNING FIGHT WITH THE ENEMY. WITH HIS LONG UNGAINLY STRIDE, THE TALL LANGSTAAD SOON OUTSTRIPPED DUPRES AND IT WAS ONLY THE CANADIAN'S PLAINTIVE CRY THAT MADE HIM SLOW A LITTLE.



GASPING FOR BREATH, THE CANADIAN GOT FARTHER AND FARTHER BEHIND.



LANGSTAAD HALTED THEN — TORN WITH INDECISION.

BY ALL THE STARS! WHAT DO I DO? RISK WAITING FOR DUPRES — OR MAKE SURE OF GETTING MY MESSAGE THROUGH?



WITH THE APPEALING CRIES OF HIS TEAM-MATE IN HIS EARS, DAG LANGSTAAD TURNED AWAY AND SPED ON TOWARDS THE BEACH.



PANTING HEAVILY, THE NORWEGIAN REACHED THE BEACH AND SWIFTLY GAVE HIS MESSAGE TO CORPORAL GREEN.

RIGHT, CALL FOR HELP GOING THROUGH NOW!

GOOD! GOOD!



THEN LITTLE FRANKIE BELL LOOKED UP FROM THE BREN GUN AND FROWNED AT DAG.

HEY! WHERE'S YOUR MATE—THAT CANADIAN CHAP?

IN HIS SLOW, STUMBLING WAY, THE NORWEGIAN GAVE HIS STORY—AND BY THE TIME HE HAD FINISHED, FRANKIE BELL WAS A SMALL INDIGNANT BALL OF FIRE.

LEFT HIM BEHIND! YOU MEAN YOU *DESERTED* HIM?

THE MESSAGE WAS IMPORTANT...

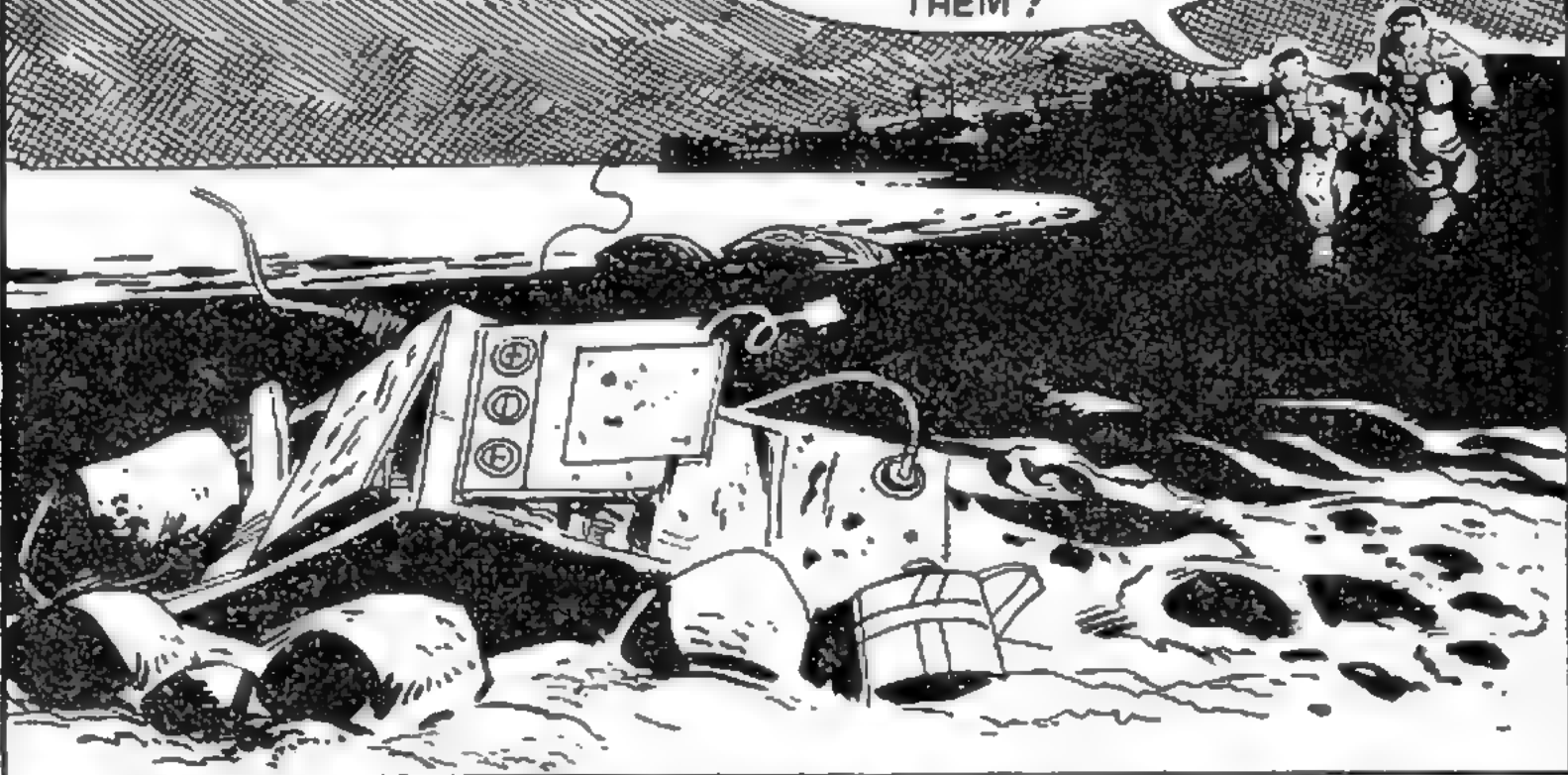
THE LITTLE COCKNEY MADE THE NORWEGIAN RETRACE HIS STEPS, BACK ALONG THE TWISTING STREETS OF REGGIO UNTIL THEY CAME TO A DARK HUDDLED FORM ON THE GROUND. FRANKIE BELL KNELT BESIDE IT...

IT'S DUPRES. ALL RIGHT—HE'S DEAD!



BUT WORSE WAS TO COME. HURRYING BACK TO THE BEACH THEY SAW NO SIGN OF BOWERS AND GREEN. THEN FRANKIE'S VOICE ROSE IN SHRILL ANGUISH...

LOOK! THE RADIO'S SMASHED! THE JERRIES MUST HAVE FOUND THEM!



SOMETHING MURDEROUS GLINTED IN FRANKIE'S EYES AS HE GLARED ACCUSINGLY AT THE GREY-FACED LANGSTAAD. BUT HIS BITTER OUTBURST WAS CUT SHORT BY A WARY HAIL FROM THE SEA...



THE URGENT MESSAGE SENT OUT BY THE LUCKLESS GREEN HAD BEEN ANSWERED. AS THE REINFORCEMENTS POURED ASHORE, FRANKIE BELL RAN TO MEET THEM...

WE'RE LOOKING FOR CAPTAIN NORRIS'S PARTY!

THEY'RE IN THE TOWN... I'LL LEAD YOU THERE, SIR!



THE LITTLE LONDONER COMPLETELY IGNORED THE DESOLATE DAG LANGSTAAD. NO WORDS COULD HAVE EXPRESSED HIS BITING SCORN MORE FORCIBLY.

WITH THE TIMELY ARRIVAL OF THE REINFORCEMENTS, CAPTAIN NORRIS WAS ABLE TO HOLD THE BUILDING AND CLEAR THE STREETS AROUND IT. LATER, HE CHANCED UPON DAG LANGSTAAD...

IT WAS AS WELL FOR US THAT YOU WON THROUGH TO THE BEACH, LANGSTAAD. BUT I HEAR YOU DESERTED DUPRES. I CAN UNDERSTAND YOU FACED A DIFFICULT DECISION — BUT THERE SHOULD HAVE BEEN SOME OTHER ANSWER.

I COULD NOT SEE ONE, SIR!



Chapter 3. Odd Partnership

IN SEPTEMBER, 1943, THE ALLIED ARMIES FOUGHT FOR A FOOTHOLD ON THE MAINLAND OF ITALY. SOME COMMANDOS TOOK PART IN THE ASSAULT BUT NOT THE TROOP TO WHICH DAG LANGSTAAD BELONGED, ALTHOUGH IT WAS HELD IN RESERVE.



THERE WAS A WEALTH OF SYMPATHY IN THE HEART OF THE CHEERY LITTLE LONDONER, FRANKIE BELL — EVEN FOR THE MAN WHO HAD LEFT HIS PARTNER IN THE LURCH.



AT FIRST THEIR CONVERSATION WAS STRAINED, BUT SOON THE WARM SUN AND MAYBE THE WARM COCKNEY HUMOUR TOO, EASED THINGS. PRESENTLY, FRANKIE BELL FOUND HIMSELF LISTENING TO THE NORWEGIAN'S HALTING STORY...

IT IS NOT A LONG STORY—
BUT IT MATTERED A LOT, TO ME!
I HAD A FRIEND—A VERY GOOD
FRIEND—BORGE WAS
HIS NAME...



AND WHILE FRANKIE LISTENED, DAG LANGSTAAD TOLD OF THE COMING OF THE NAZIS TO HIS BELOVED NORWAY. HE AND BORGE HAD JOINED THE RESISTANCE, FIGHTING THE GERMANS AT EVERY OPPORTUNITY. ONE DAY, HOWEVER, THE CHASE HAD BECOME TOO HOT...



THEY DECIDED TO SPLIT UP AND TO MEET DOWN ON THE BEACH IN THE LITTLE FISHING HUT THEY HAD USED BEFORE AS A HIDING PLACE.

DAG LANGSTAAD HAD MANAGED TO THROW OFF HIS PURSUERS AND REACH THE FISHING HUT UNSEEN, CONFIDENT THAT BORGE WOULD SOON JOIN HIM.

FOR TWO HOURS HE WAITED — AND STILL BORGE HAD NOT ARRIVED. THEN DAG HEARD BOOTS CRUNCHING ON THE SHINGLE OUTSIDE.



WHEN THE SOUNDS STOPPED, A HARSH COMMAND HAD RUNG OUT, CALLING UPON DAG LANGSTAAD TO COME OUT AND SURRENDER...

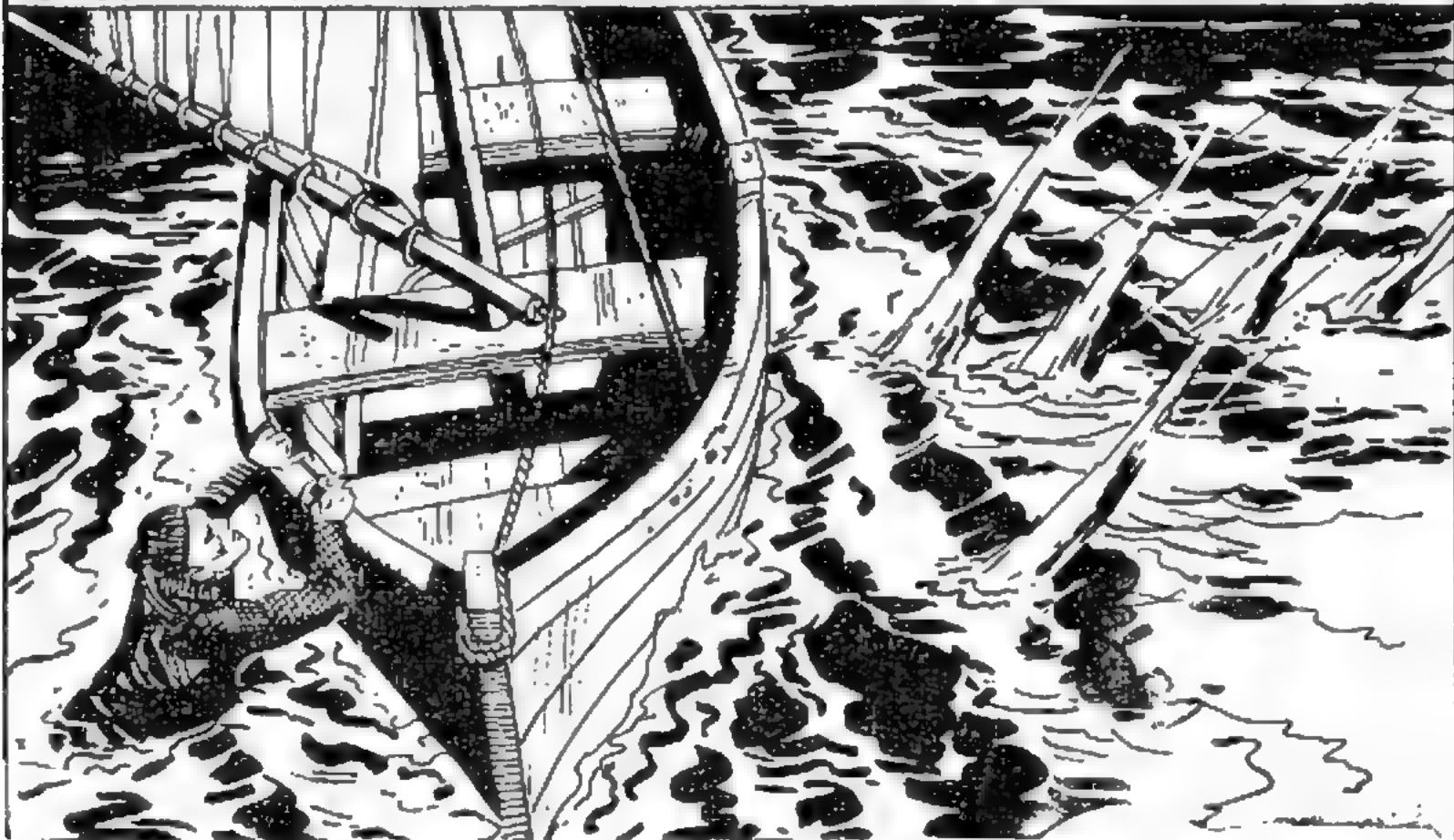


... AND THERE WAS BORGE WITH THE HATED ENEMY. BORGE, HIS LIFE-LONG FRIEND. BORGE WHO, TO SAVE HIS OWN LIFE, HAD BETRAYED HIM!

TO FIGHT WOULD HAVE BEEN FUTILE. AS THEY WERE LED AWAY TO CERTAIN DEATH, THEIR PATH TOOK THEM ALONG THE SIDE OF THE FJORD. DAG LANGSTAAD SAW A SLIM CHANCE OF ESCAPE — AND TOOK IT.



SWIMMING BELOW SURFACE IN THAT ICE-COLD WATER, HE BRAVED A HAIL OF BULLETS TO CLAMBER ABOARD A SMALL SAILING BOAT MOORED NEARBY.



WITH A SELF-CONSCIOUS GRUNT, DAG LANGSTAAD REACHED THE END OF HIS STORY.

I WAS PICKED UP BY THE COMMANDOS—
AND THE REST YOU KNOW. THAT IS WHY
I HAVE VOWED—NO MORE FRIENDS, NO
MORE TRUST. BETTER TO
FIGHT ALONE!



THE TALK WITH THE LONE NORWEGIAN
IMPRESSED FRANKIE BELL SO MUCH
THAT HE LATER ASKED TO SEE HIS
COMMANDING OFFICER. AFTER
RECITING LANGSTAAD'S STORY, THE
LITTLE COCKNEY CAME TO HIS POINT...

I DON'T LIKE TO SEE HIM
ON HIS OWN, SIR. NOW I'VE
LOST MY MATE, WHY NOT
MAKE LANGSTAAD MY BREN
GUNNER, SIR?



WELL,
LANGSTAAD'S CERTAINLY
GOT THE NECESSARY
BRAWN...

TIGER TRAFFORD THOUGHT FOR A
MOMENT, THEN LOOKED UP WITH
ONE OF HIS RARE SMILES...

ALL RIGHT,
BELL—WE'LL TRY
LANGSTAAD AS YOUR
BREN GUNNER.

THANK
YOU, SIR!



AND SO IT CAME ABOUT THAT DAG LANGSTAAD WAS SADDLED WITH A WEIGHTY BREN GUN AND SHARPLY PUT THROUGH HIS PACES BY A SECRETLY PLEASED FRANKIE BELL...

THAT'S BETTER, MATE! BUT THIS TIME I WANT YOU TO CUT DOWN THEM TARGETS WITH JUST HALF THE AMMO!



BY THE END OF THE MONTH, ACTION CAME AGAIN. ON THE NIGHT OF SEPTEMBER 25th, A FORCE OF ONE HUNDRED AND EIGHTY COMMANDOS OF ALL RANKS SET OUT UP THE ADRIATIC COAST...



THEIR TARGET WAS THE RAILWAY YARDS AT POLINO, SUPPLY ROUTE OF THE ENEMY'S STUBBORN RESISTANCE TO THE EIGHTH ARMY.

AS THE ASSAULT CRAFT PLOUGHED ONWARDS, THERE WAS LITTLE TALKING, EACH MAN WRAPPED UP IN HIS OWN THOUGHTS ABOUT THE ORDEAL AHEAD.



THE LANDING JUST SOUTH OF POLINO WAS MADE UNOPPOSED. BUT A FEW BOATS, LIKE NORRIS', GROUNDED WELL SHORT OF THE BEACH...



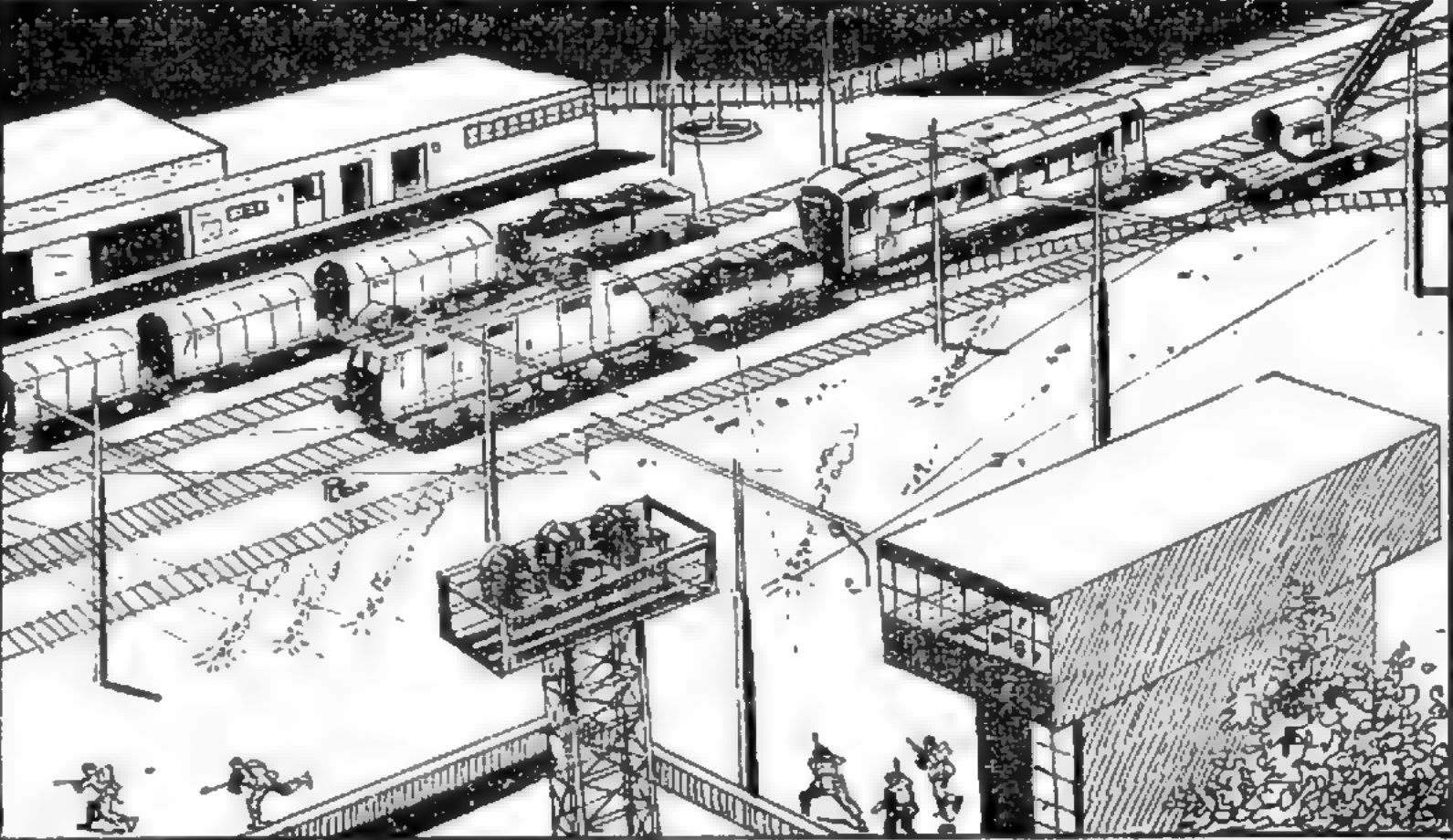
HANDICAPPED BY HIS SHORTER INCHES, FRANKIE BELL FOUND THE GOING DIFFICULT BUT RECEIVED NO HELP FROM HIS TEAM-MATE, LANGSTAAD.



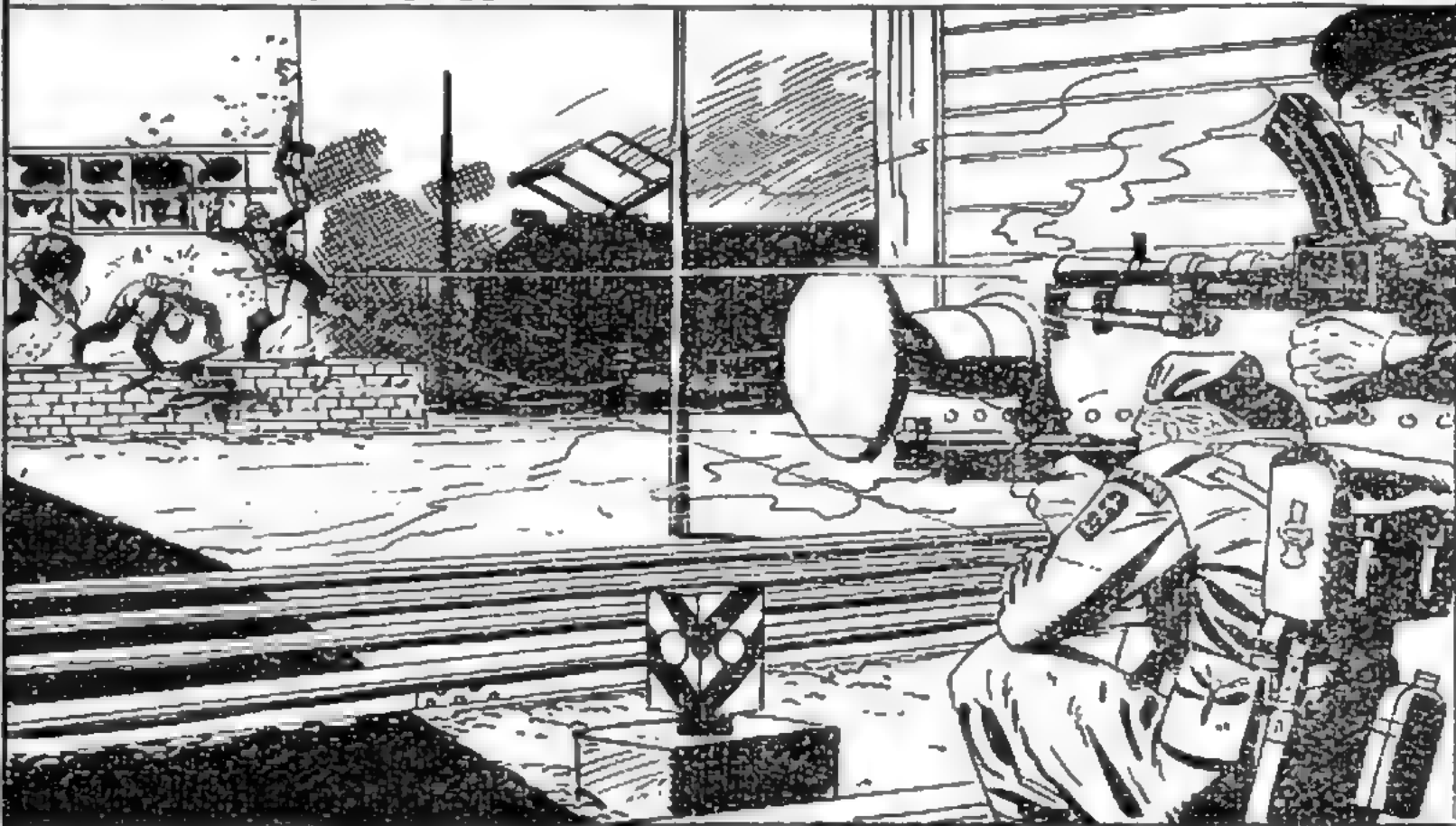
STRUGGLING ASHORE AT LAST WITH THE HEAVY AMMUNITION CASE, THE INCENSED FRANKIE STUMBLED AFTER LANGSTAAD. THE LITTLE COCKNEY'S EYES BLAZED...



THE ATTACK ON THE RAILWAY YARDS AT POLINO WAS SUDDEN, SWIFT AND DEADLY. NAZI SENTRIES WERE TACKLED WITH RUTHLESS EFFICIENCY...



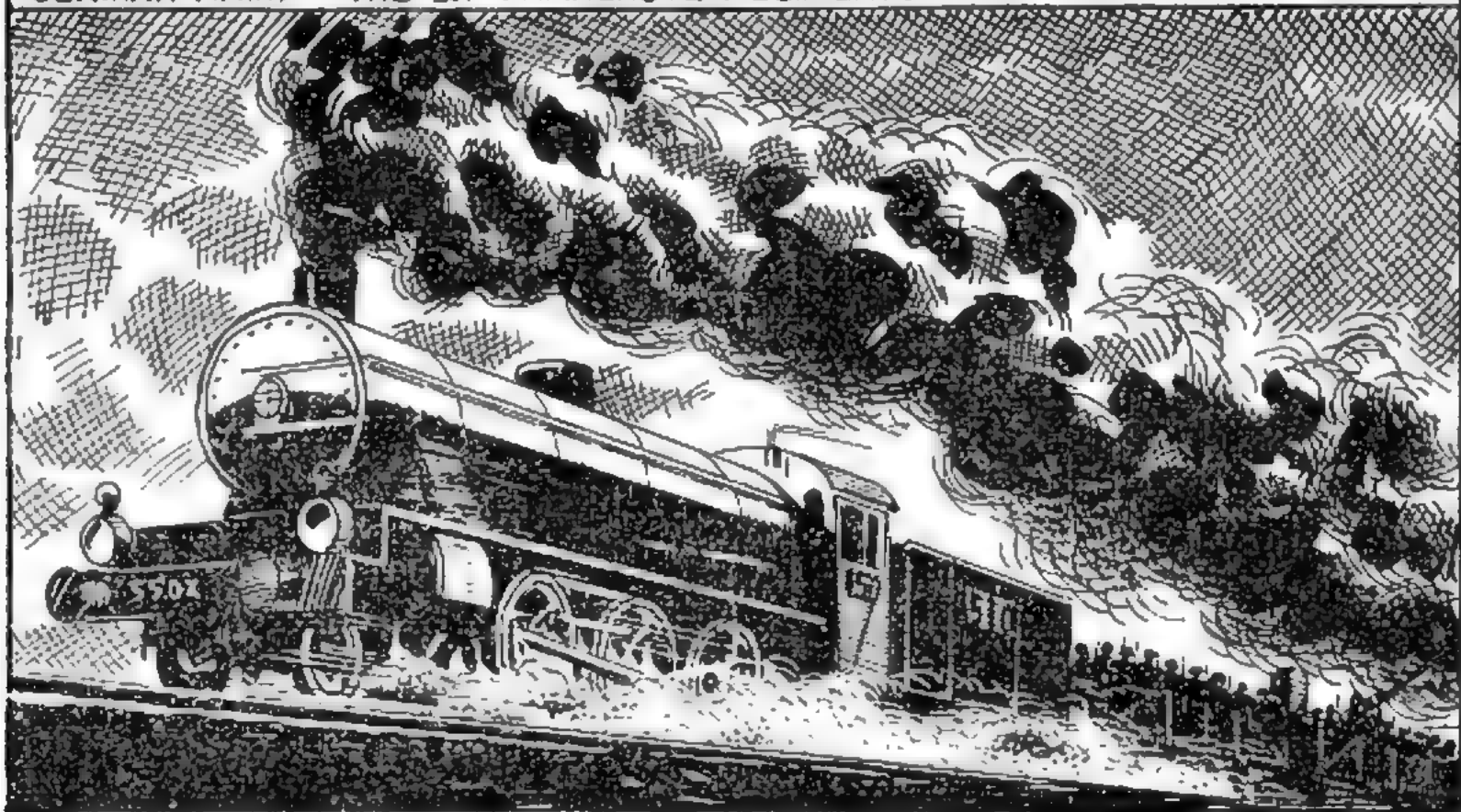
THE ARRIVAL OF THE REST OF THE ENEMY GUARDS FROM THEIR QUARTERS WAS MET WITH A STORM OF GUNFIRE ...



WHERE THE ENEMY OPPOSITION WAS FIERCEST, THERE WAS DAG LANGSTAAD AT WORK WITH HIS BREN GUN, COOLLY DIRECTED BY FRANKIE BELL.



AS THE FIGHT RAGED, GERMAN REINFORCEMENTS WERE RUSHING TO THE SCENE. THEY WOULD BE FORMIDABLE OPPONENTS, FOR THEY WERE THE ELITE OF THE GERMAN ARMY — THE 1st PARACHUTE REGIMENT.



YET EVEN AS THE ENEMY THREAT DREW NEAR, PRECAUTIONS WERE BEING TAKEN BY CAPTAIN NORRIS.

SERGEANT ROSE, TAKE FARROW, LANGSTAAD AND BELL. BLOW THE RAILWAY LINES AT THE BRIDGE — AND QUICK ABOUT IT!

RIGHT, SIR!



ARMED WITH DEMOLITION PACKS, SERGEANT ROSE LED THE OTHER THREE ON A SCRAMBLING RUN UNTIL THEY SIGHTED THEIR OBJECTIVE — THE RAILWAY BRIDGE SPANNING THE SWIFT FLOWING RIVER RUNNING DOWN TO POLINO.

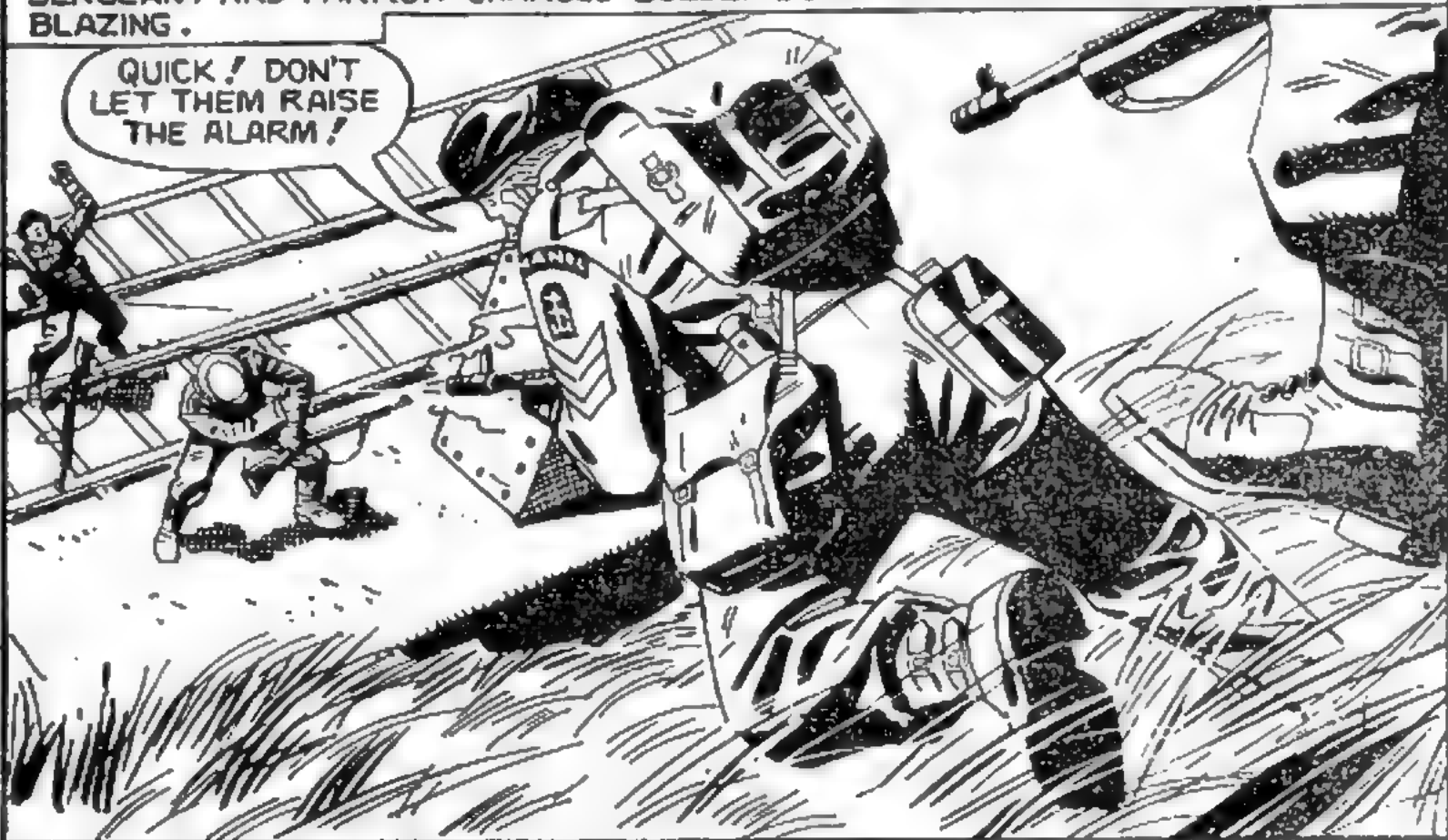
FARROW AND I WILL PUT PAID TO THE SENTRIES AND BLOW THE LINES. YOU OTHER TWO KEEP US COVERED WITH THE BREN.

OKAY, SARGE!



THERE WAS NOT A MOMENT TO LOSE. THROWING CAUTION TO THE WIND, THE SERGEANT AND FARROW CHARGED BOLDLY DOWN THE STEEP BANKING, GUNS BLAZING.

QUICK! DON'T LET THEM RAISE THE ALARM!



BUT THEIR BOLDNESS WAS THEIR UNDOING. FROM ITS DARK CONCEALMENT, AN ENEMY MACHINE GUN SPAT DEATH...



LANGSTAAD HAD PIN-POINTED THE SPANDAU'S MUZZLE FLASH. HIS BIG FIST SQUEEZED ON THE TRIGGER...



THE NORWEGIAN'S DEADLY ACCURATE BURST OF FIRE TORE INTO THE MACHINE GUN POSITION...



NEXT MOMENT, FRANKIE BELL WAS LEAPING DOWN THE INCLINE, HIS MIND BENT ON DEMOLITION, HIS ANXIOUS EARS FILLED WITH A DISTANT DRUMMING SOUND...

THE TRAIN!
I'LL HAVE TO BLOW THESE
LINES MYSELF!

A black and white comic panel showing a soldier, Frankie Bell, leaping down a steep, rocky incline. He is wearing a military uniform and a beret. His arms are outstretched, and he appears to be in a hurry. The incline is steep and rocky, with some sparse vegetation. In the background, there are some structures and what looks like a train track. The overall tone is urgent and action-packed.

IT WAS A RACE NOW BETWEEN THE ONCOMING TRAIN AND FRANKIE'S FUMBLING FINGERS.

HECK!
IT'S CLOSE!

A black and white comic panel showing Frankie Bell in a close-up, fumbling with a dynamite fuse. He is wearing a military uniform and a beret. He has a look of intense concentration and urgency on his face. The background shows the structure of a train or a bridge, with metal beams and rivets. The overall tone is tense and dramatic.

THE JOB WAS DONE WITH ONLY A SPLIT SECOND TO SPARE. AS FRANKIE SPURTED FOR COVER, THE TREMENDOUS BLAST OF THE EXPLOSION HURLED HIM TO THE GROUND.



NO BRAKES COULD HAVE STOPPED THE LOCOMOTIVE IN TIME. IT PLUNGED INTO THE RIVER DRAGGING THE FIRST TWO TRUCKS WITH IT.



A SNAPPED COUPLING SAVED A TOTAL WRECK AND FROM THE REMAINING TRUCKS LEAPED AN ANGRY HORDE OF GERMAN PARATROOPERS, THIRSTING SAVAGELY FOR VENGEANCE.

HURRY! SCHNELL!



FRANKIE BROKE FROM COVER. HE COVERED TWENTY YARDS BEFORE A BURST OF SCHMEISSER FIRE CUT HIM DOWN...

AAGH... MY LEG!



FRANKIE FELL WOUNDED, AND THE NEXT INSTANT, WAS SURROUNDED BY TOUGH GERMAN PARATROOPS...

THERE MUST BE OTHERS! WHERE ARE THEY — ANSWER, DOG!



PEERING DOWN FROM HIS HIDING PLACE AND LISTENING TO THE RISING WRATH OF THE GERMAN OFFICER, DAG LANGSTAAD'S LIP CURLED IN CYNICAL RESIGNATION...

WILL MY SO-CALLED FRIEND BETRAY ME? JUST AS BORGE BETRAYED ME, BACK HOME IN NORWAY?



BUT EVEN THOUGH THE GERMAN'S BLOWS AND ABUSE RAINED UPON HIM, FRANKIE KEPT A STUBBORN SILENCE. AT LAST THE OFFICER'S IMPATIENCE ROSE TO A FRENZY...

SPEAK OR YOU SHALL DIE!



BUT DAG HAD SEEN WITH WONDER THE BRAVE REFUSAL OF HIS TEAM-MATE TO BETRAY HIM. AND HE SUDDENLY ROSE UP, BREN GUN AT HIS HIP.

MURDERING DOGS OF GERMANS!



WITH THE BREN GUN HELD AS IF IT WERE NO MORE WEIGHT THAN A RIFLE, THE GIANT NORWEGIAN PRESENTED A WILD AND TRULY TERRIFYING FIGURE.



SEIZING HIS CHANCE, FRANKIE BELL BEGAN A HOBBLING RUN TOWARDS LANGSTAAD, YELLING A WARNING AS HE DID SO.



Comrades in Arms

THE NORWEGIAN STOOD THERE UNAFRAID — THE BREN HAMMERING UNTIL THE MAGAZINE WAS EMPTY. THEN HE FELT A SEARING PAIN IN HIS ARM AND THE BREN DROPPED TO THE GROUND.



FRANKIE NEVER KNEW HOW HE COVERED THOSE LAST UPHILL YARDS, BUT SOMEHOW HE FOUND HIMSELF BESIDE THE NORWEGIAN, HIS THIN SHOULDER THROBBING TO THE KICK OF THE BREN GUN...



SCATTERING FROM THIS FURIOUS FIRE THE GERMANS MELTED FROM SIGHT. FRANKIE CAST A SWIFT LOOK UPWARD AND THEN AT THE TAUT-FACED LANGSTAAD...

LISTEN, WE'VE GOT TO GET BACK UP THIS HILL BEFORE THE PERISHERS CUT US OFF. CAN YOU MAKE IT?

IF YOU CAN WITH A BAD LEG THEN I CAN WITH A BAD ARM!



MAKING USE OF EVERY INCH OF COVER, THEY SLIPPED AWAY INTO THE DARKNESS.

HAVE COURAGE, FRIEND.

IT'S A SPARE LEG I COULD DO WITH!



THE LONG HAUL BACK WAS FULL OF DANGER AND DAG LANGSTAAD BEGAN TO REALISE AT LAST TO THE FULL THAT ONLY TOGETHER AS A TEAM COULD THEY SURVIVE.

QUICK! GIVE ME THE BREN!



WHILE LANGSTAAD WITH HIS ONE GOOD ARM WAS ABLE TO CARRY THE WEAPON, FRANKIE BELL COULD FIRE IT—WITH DEVASTATING EFFECT...



EACH KNEW THAT THE OTHER WAS DEPENDENT ON HIM AND EACH HELPED THE OTHER TO KEEP GOING, TO FIGHT OFF PAIN AND COLLAPSE.

IN THAT MANNER, THEY STUMBLED BACK TO THE BLAZING RAILWAY YARDS WHERE CAPTAIN NORRIS GREETED THEM WARMLY...



LANGSTAAD!
BELL! YOU CRASHED
THE TRAIN!

YES, SIR—
BUT SOME
GERMANS STILL
COME.



WHILE THEIR WOUNDS WERE HASTILY DRESSED, DAG LANGSTAAD QUICKLY MADE HIS REPORT. WITHOUT WAITING FOR MORE, CAPTAIN NORRIS SWUNG ROUND AND ROARED HIS ORDERS...



KEEPING JUST AHEAD OF THE GERMAN PARATROOPS, THE COMMANDOS REACHED THE BEACH. THEIR ASSAULT BOATS TOOK OFF INTO THE DARKNESS, LEAVING THE ENEMY TO VENT THEIR WRATH IN FUTILE SHOOTING.



AS THEIR CRAFT BEGAN TO LIFT TO THE DEEPER SWELL, CAPTAIN NORRIS EASED THROUGH HIS TIRED BUT HAPPY MEN FOR A WORD WITH THE NORWEGIAN SITTING BESIDE HIS WOUNDED COMRADE.

WELL, LANGSTAAD, WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE TWO-MAN TEAM SPIRIT NOW?

I THINK IT VERY GOOD — BUT ONLY IF I CAN STAY WITH FRANKIE BELL!

I THINK I FINALLY CONVINCED HIM, SIR!

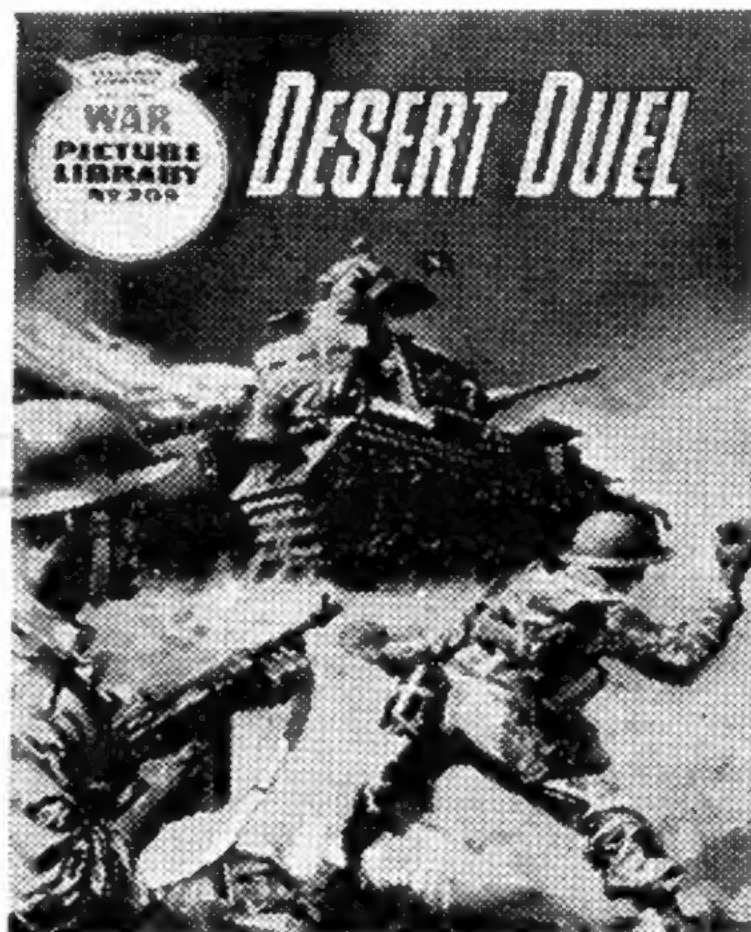


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